THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR
A Canadian view of St. Petersburg

I have been fascinated all my life by the city where two contradictory events took place: the publishing of "The Brothers Karamazov" in 1881, and the communist revolution of 1917. They are the most dramatic represention for me of the two sides of the Russian character--slavophile and western--that have been competing for power since the time of Peter the Great. They are similar in nature to the two sides of the Canadian character--anti-American and pro-American--that have been competing for power in this country since 1776. I would like to make a one-hour film that would help arouse in Canadians as much concern as I have for one of the world's most beautiful cities, threatened as it is now with decline and decay.

The portrait of St. Petersburg would be drawn through the eyes of a few Canadians who know the city well:

HARRY GIESBRECHT was born in Ukraine in 1928 and moved to Winnipeg in 1948. He founded Central Canadian Structures in 1967, and now heads a construction giant with projects in China, the Middle East, and eastern Europe. In St. Petersburg, he is building a hotel called the Okhtinskaya. He contributes a portion of his profits to the Russian Academy of Science.

JACOB LUSTIG left Czechoslovakia after the Russian invasion of 1963. He lives in Montreal, and is President of Commerce International, which imports dried fruit and restaurant equipment into Russia. He owns and operates the biggest bread factory in St. Petersburg, and has just opened a restaurant there called the Montreal Steak House, with beef imported daily from Alberta.

SLAVA IGOROV is a film music composer who emigrated to Montreal after he toured North America in 1988 with Aquarium, the popular rock band from St. Petersburg that he helped to found. He is currently working on a scheme to promote the exchange of performing artists between St. Petersburg and Montreal.

OLGA KULIKOVSKY-ROMANOFF has lived in Toronto for 20 years, and runs the biggest Russian relief programme in Canada. It is named after her former mother-in-law Olga Alexandrovna, sister of the last czar. It sends medical and food supplies to hospitals and orphanages in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The film would depict two or three Canadians like these visiting St. Petersburg during the White Nights of early summer, when both the attractions and the imperfections of the city are most fully exposed. The visitors would be shown meeting with some of the people that I met in St. Petersburg on a research trip last summer:

ANDRE BENOIT, from Montreal, is Director of Public Affairs for the Russian operations of the American food giant RJR-Nabisco. In St.

Petersburg, RJR-Petro manufactures the North Star cigarette, created for the Russian market. Benoit is responsible for developing the company's programme of sponsorship of the performing arts in St. Petersburg. He sits on the city's "International Action Committee", co-chaired by Mayor Sobchuk and Henry Kissinger.

ALEXANDR GUTMAN, President of Monolitstroy Design and Construction Company, is collaborating with Aluma Systems of Toronto, in renovating the exteriors of the Hermitage and the Peter & Paul Fortress church, and the interiors of an office building at #25 Nevsky Prospekt.

SEVA GAEKKEL is a cello player who was another founding member of Aquarium. He left the group at the same time as Slava Igorov, but returned to St. Petersburg to run a drop-in centre for young people called the Tam-Tam Club. Here adolescents with no future learn to play musical instruments in return for abstinence from drugs and alcohol.

REV. BORIS BEREGOVSKY, bishop of the beautiful Cathedral of Transfiguration, attended by Seva Gaekkel's family. It is the chapel of the Academy of the Artillery nearby, and home of one of the best choirs in Russia. Father Beregovsky is an imposing figure who expresses well the revival of the Russian Orthodox church. His office contains one of the most elegant collections of egg icons in St. Petersburg.

DR. BORIS NIKIFOROV is head surgeon at the Marinska Hospital neurological clinic, which receives pharmaceutical and dressing supplies from the Olga Alexandrovna Fund in Toronto. He was born to Russian refugees in Shanghai, and returned to St. Petersburg as a young man in 1947. He has spoken at medical gatherings in San Francisco and Vancouver about new techniques he has developed for treating constricted arteries.

TATIANA SAVELJEVA is director of the Blue Crow orphanage, which also receives aid from Toronto. During the White Nights, she would be found supervising her twenty 9-to-16 year old homeless kids as they hunt squirrels with sling-shots, fish with string and tree branches, draw on birch bark with burnt sticks, and sleep under the open sky in the unclaimed corner of a forest an hour's train ride and an hour's walk north of St. Petersburg.

MARIA BRUSOVANY is curator of Dostoevsky manuscripts and graphics at the Dostoevsky Museum. She is leading the fight to preserve these precious documents, which are threatened with decay if adequate air conditioning equipment is not soon installed. Lying on the desk in Dostoevsky's study, we will see some of the manuscript of "Brothers Karamazov", opened at one of the pages of the chapter about the Mysterious Visitor. The voice of an actor will be heard throughout the film reading extracts from this chapter about the tension between ambition and redemption, between individual and collective survival--themes that concern all of us in these times of spiritual and economic crisis.

Martin Duckworth
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